

those I had as a child away on a solitary walk. Only when I am able to go and wander through some spring wood, do I sense being a part of life and know that I am the same person of so long ago.

In my garden, beneath the miserly trapping of February, I have a memento I brought back from one of my excursions as a youth. One of my first discoveries was a wild flower called jack-in-the-pulpit. I found this pastor of the moist woodlands ministering to a congregation of Dutchman's breeches and blushing spring beauties deep in the shaded depths of a wood I still remember well today. Although he has never failed to greet me each spring, I have felt a sense of guilt because I have taken him from his home. He still preaches and stands as straight as ever in his pulpit, but there is no congregation to listen to the words I cannot hear.

I have learned that one cannot bring the beauty of the spring and the wild countryside into one's backyard, as I had attempted to do, but that one must leave off the cares of the world and steal down a solitary forest path in order to know the true beauty of nature. Often, I would lie down in the warm timothy grass and listen to the honeybees go about their gathering among the yellow blossoms of a wild forsythia and watch them cast pale saffron-colored petals adrift in the morning air to leave dusty trails of pollen on my face. The heavy air, laden with the perfume from the massed blossoms of the wild cherry and rosebud trees above my head, would lull me into a quiet dream, interrupted only by the occasional chattering of meadowlarks busily weaving a nest in the tall grass nearby. It is surprising the great store of discovery and adventure that can be known to small boys in such places. I can only feel sorry for those who did not early discover the delights of such times and places, and I can only hope that my thoughts will bring others to experience the impatient awaiting of spring that I do, as I gaze through my window on this cold and bleak winter's evening.

The Indifference of the Universe

Mike Schwartz

WHATEVER the nature of the universe, ordered or chaotic, teleological or mechanistic, whatever its nature, described in either philosophic jargon or lay terms, this basic fact concerning it seems manifest: the universe, in itself, is dreadfully indifferent. This indifference is so dreadful because of man's egotistical nature. Even adverse "spirits" or forces are much more reassuring than an indifferent universe because they at least recognize man's existence, *the only fact which he knows for certain*, as significant. Stephen Crane in his short story, "The Open Boat," illustrates this essential fear of insignificance. In this story a gull, which can be regarded as a symbol of nature, flitted about the four men in the boat, almost landing on the head of one of them. These

men, who were beginning to lose hope of surviving their experience in the boat, did not regard the bird as amusing; rather, "the bird struck their minds at this time as being somehow gruesome and ominous." It did so because the men realized that nature, represented by the bird, was totally unconcerned about their fate.

Everyone, ultimately, must face this indifference. But most men do so only briefly, quickly shrinking back to insulate themselves from nature by one of a variety of defenses. Today in our culture, the most prevalent defense against the reality of life is the elevation of the acquisition of wealth to virtually absolute importance. Thus elevated, many people devote almost all their energy to this acquisition and hence ignore any "reality" beyond it. Another defense which is very easily adopted today is that of "scientism." This particular defense is so easily adopted because modern science has accumulated such a large body of knowledge that no one person can assimilate it. Consequently, a small mind can become infatuated with man's erudition to the virtual exclusion of the nagging presence of reality. Closely related to this defense is the ego-elevating defense of rationalism. Bertrand Russell provides a good example of a rationalist. Although Lord Russell acknowledged the problem of reality, he passed it off as insoluble. He was able to do this because he had become so infatuated with his own vaunted rationalism that reality ceased to be a vital issue to him. All in all, there is an astounding variety of "causes" and ideals which one can elevate to the position of an absolute. But perhaps one defense warrants closer examination than the others; that particular defense is religion. It is not clear to one who has never known it whether religious experience is valid or not; what is clear is that most people's "faith" is merely a defense against life. An excellent contrast between religion which is patently a defense and "true" religion can be found in Ole Rølvaag's novel, *Giants in the Earth*. In the novel Beret, a sensitive, guilt-ridden woman, is placed in the power of the completely indifferent prairie; she reacts by beginning to withdraw into insanity. But before she has advanced to an irreparable condition, she embraces religion. Yet after she does so, her personality is not altered in the respects which indicate a truly religious person. Instead of being humble, she becomes self-righteous; instead of being awed by God, she is only comforted by Him. The effective foil to Beret and her shallow religion is afforded by the minister. In him one finds the qualities of humility and awe of God; but in the minister, who fervently believes in God, one also finds a seeming contradiction for ". . . *In him* faith was lacking; of that he was painfully aware." This, I submit, is only a seeming contradiction, for it illustrates the nature of that type of religion which does not separate a person from life. I submit that a sincerely religious person never fully attains his goal of perfect faith; that his faith is always in the process "of becoming"; that he must continuously strive to keep his imperfect faith, which constantly eludes him; that his religion does not insulate him from

the awful indifference of his environment. But whether or not it is done with this sincerely religious outlook, the confronting of reality and all its implications is the necessary prerequisite to seeking a meaningful existence. The problem of finding meaning in existence once one has confronted it is another matter to be dealt with if one survives the confrontation.

Sensation of a Dream

Michael Lamm

AROUND and around and around, down into a swirling black funnel. Movement was my devilish world. I never stopped once, but descended deeper and deeper, spinning faster and faster down a spiralling tube that had no bottom or top. When I closed my eyes, I was pinned mercilessly against the small raft I was on, feeling with my body the powerful spinning. With my eyes open, I saw nothing but endless walls of nauseating water, sliding me farther and farther downward. A queasy lightness gripped my stomach, and I vomited fire. Flames spewed out as I erupted, and in a twinkling of an eye the water vanished.

From the unshaven derelict on the soggy raft, I entered the body of a great bird. Circling about a misty mountaintop, I caught glimpses of the land far below. It stretched out under me for miles and miles. Black forests in clumps, lush green patchwork for pastures, and grey, massive stone mountains came into view as I glided high above the world. A cold, strong wind blew from the north and held me suspended on my massive wings. Turning sharply, I dived with blinding speed down the mountainside. The wind whistled around me as I cut the air with my folded wings. Rocks and shrubbery blurred past as I headed faster and faster down into the valley. A small cloud was ahead of me. For an instant everything was white and smelling of morning dew as I cut through the white billows. The lush valley flashed into view. At two thousand feet I spread my wings to slow my speed. The valley floor sprawled below me in verdant plains and jagged rocks. A deep, blue lake twinkled in the morning sunlight. I realized with a start of fear that I was not slowing down, but going even faster! With all my strength I forced my heavy, cumbersome wings into action. Slowly, slowly I started to flap, but my wings were too heavy. I strained and groaned to pull my own weight to level flight, but I only screamed more swiftly toward the valley floor. With a violent force of mind, I urged my huge body up as I came within a few feet of the sharp rocks below. My talons were scraped by the stones as I glided with effort over the ground, still attempting to rise. But it was no use. I was defeated, pinned to the earth. Held by some frustrating force to the ground, every muscle in my great body strained to lift me into the air. I sped over the rocky terrain barely able to move my wings.